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ABSTRACT

Tom Wolfe is widely regarded as the leading theorist and practitioner of New Journalism, the journalistic genre that combines the stylistic features of fiction and the reportorial obligations of journalism to produce a "novelistic sounding" but nonetheless factual literature. The saliency of Wolfe's stylistic boldness has prompted many to conclude that the absorbing, convincing quality of Wolfe's work is owed primarily to his unique and innovative stylistic techniques. But Wolfe is more than just a clever stylist; his essays reveal a carefully crafted argument through which he constructs an appealing rhetorical reality wherein there are simple, absolute, almost hilariously obvious explanations for everything. The rhetorical vision is architecturally achieved by Wolfe's reliance on (1) analogy and metaphor, (2) single causality, and (3) hyperbolic "put-on." (The major portions of the paper analyzes Wolfe's usage of these three devices in terms of its persuasive impact, philosophical dimensions, and journalistic implications.) (Author/GW)

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TOM WOLFE AND THE USES OF ARGUMENT

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TOM WOLFE AND THE USES OF ARGUMENT

The past decade witnessed an emerging trend in journalism: the rise of personalized, subjective reporting. Labeled "New Journalism" or "New Nonfiction," this new genre combines the stylistic features of fiction and the reportorial obligations of journalism to produce a "novelistic sounding," but nonetheless, factual literature.[1] Whereas the traditional journalist assumes the time-honored approach of summarily answering questions of who-what-when-where-why-how, the New Journalist seeks to transcend such orthodoxy by becoming something more than just a reporter: he attempts to shape his audience's shared perception of reality. He exercises "imaginative" reporting--imaginative, says Dan Wakefield, "not because the author has distorted the facts, but because he has presented them in a full instead of a naked manner, brought out the sights, sounds, and feel surrounding those facts, and connected them by comparison with other facts of history, society, and literature in an artistic manner that does not diminish but gives great depth and dimension to the facts."[2]

The New Journalist's desire to trespass traditional journalist boundaries stems primarily from two factors. First, his skepticism for authority is greater than that of his conventional predecessor. In light of new and ever increasing revelations of political scandal and corruption, the New Journalist views suspiciously most public figures and generally mistrusts "official" facts. And so, "Today, when a New Journalist tells it, there is likely to be no deference to an official version--if anything, perhaps a semiautomatic disdain of one."[3] Second, the New Journalist is ready to

personalize his writing because he refuses to accept that he is a conduit for dispersing information. Because of greater professional self-consciousness and self-confidence, he believes he is capable of more. Explains Paul Weaver:

> Traditionally, reporting had been a low-prestige occupation; some studies reported it to rank between the blue-collar and white-collar occupations. In the 1960's this began to change. President Kennedy showed a special fondness for newsmen; the inauguration in 1963 of the national half-hour television news programs gave the press a new vehicle of unprecedented power and created, overnight, a batch of journalistic celebrities; officials became ever more attentive to the press, and their efforts to manipulate the news grew in scale and sophistication; books and articles about the press began to proliferate; and by the beginning of the 1970's scale salaries at leading newspapers approached (and, in TV, exceeded) those of Assistant Secretaries. Whatever the cause, newsmen had a growing sense of their importance and a corresponding unwillingness to accept the dependency and subordination which, as it seemed, had been characteristic of the position of the press in earlier decades.[4]

New Journalism is one manifestation of the reporter's increasing self concept. A dynamic and exciting literary form, the new genre has influenced dramatically the course of American journalism.

Many have served the movement, but the individual perhaps most responsible for proving that journalism could capture the excitement, tension, and intrigue formerly reserved for other literary forms was Tom Wolfe, the leading theorist and practitioner of New Journalism. One of America's foremost contemporary journalists, Wolfe has reported about Ken Kesey and the world of hallucinogenic drugs--The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test;[5] described the fund-raising skills of black militants--Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers;[6] analyzed the birth and development of New Journalism--The New Journalism;[7] traced the history of modern art--The Painted Word;[8] and scrutinized present-day mores in three anthologies of previously published essays--The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby,[9] The Pump House Gang,[10] and Mauve Gloves and Madman Clutter and Vine.[11]

The saliency of Wolfe's stylistic boldness has prompted many to conclude that the absorbing, "convincing" quality of Wolfe's work is owed primarily to his unique and innovative use of punctuation, typography, language, and syntax.[12] To be sure, style cannot be dismissed in accounting for Wolfe's rhetorical appeal. But Wolfe is more than just a clever stylist. His essays reveal a carefully crafted argument whose supporting evidence and reasoning is tailored rhetorically for effective fit. The thesis set-forth here is that Wolfe's uses of argument enable him to construct an appealing rhetorical reality wherein there are simple, absolute, almost "hilariously" obvious explanations for everything. The rhetorical vision is architecturally achieved by Wolfe's reliance on (1) analogy and metaphor, (2) single causality, and (3) hyperbolic "put-on." It is this rhetorical posture--its suasory impact, philosophical dimensions, and journalistic implications--that is the concern of the analysis that follows.

Analogy and Metaphor. Epistemologically, the strength of analogy and metaphor lies in their creation of what Kenneth Burke calls "perspective by incongruity"--the "revealing of hitherto unsuspected connectives . . . relationships between objects which our customary rational vocabulary has ignored."[13] Providing a way of perceiving experience, the metaphor, concludes Max Black, "suppresses some details, emphasizes others--in short, it organizes our view of man."[14] As such, analogy and metaphor function to reconcile the complexities of environment. In the 1960s and 1970s, among those attempting to explain society's many competing and disorienting forces was the deft user of analogy and metaphor, Tom Wolfe.

Wolfe's varied use of literal analogy, in particular, is most effective in providing instant, easily grasped understanding. Frequently Wolfe draws

parallels between historical periods, as in his explanation of why those attending Leonard Bernstein's fund-raising party for imprisoned members of the Black Panther Party felt the need for social "slumming," known also as nostalgie de la boue:

> Nostalgie de la boue tends to be a favorite motif whenever a great many new faces and a lot of new money enter Society. New arrivals have always had two ways of certifying their superiority over the hated "middle class." They can take on the trappings of aristocracy, such as grand architecture, servants, parterre boxes, and high protocol; and they can indulge in the gauche thrill of taking on certain styles of the lower orders. The two are by no means mutually exclusive, in fact, they are always used in combination. In England during the Regency period, nostalgie de la boue was very much the rage. London socialites during the Regency adopted the flamboyant capes and wild driving styles of the coach drivers, the "bruiser" fashions and hair styles of the bare-knuckle prize fighters, the see-through, jutting-nipple fashions of the tavern girls, as well as a reckless new dance, the waltz. Such affectations were meant to convey the arrogant self-confidence of the aristocrat as opposed to the middle-class striver's obsession with propriety and keeping up appearances. During the 1960's in New York nostalgie de la boue took the form of the vogue of rock music, the twist-frug genre of dances, Pop Art, Camp, the courting of pet primitives such as the Rolling Stones and Jose Torres, and innumerable dress fashions summed up in the recurrent image of the wealthy young man with his turtleneck jersey meeting his muttonchops at mid-jowel, a la the 1962 Sixth Avenue Automat bohemian, bidding good night to an aging doorman dressed in the mode of an 1870 Austrian army colonel.[15]

Wolfe's is not always a well-developed historical comparison. Often the analogy is brief but provocative as, for example, Wolfe's passing comment that the "Playboy Philosophy" is a document that serves to legitimize and justify Hugh Hefner's sex-oriented enterprises in much the same way that libraries built by Andrew Carnegie sanctioned his business activites.[16] Or take Wolfe's fleeting observation that the teenager custom-car world is similar to the Renaissance "when sculpture was always more tied up with religion and architecture," and "apprentices [came] to the feet of the master."[17]

To those who appreciate Wolfe's historical lessons, his analogies provide a perspective on contemporary realities; the environment becomes structurally manageable. Moreover, Wolfe's use of historical analogy augments his credibility. Wolfe's analysis is seen as more than just one individual's speculation because it is supported and bolstered by the objective teachings of historical precedent. Similarly, analogy can enhance source credibility by suggesting the measure of one's intelligence. Wolfe may demonstrate his knowledge of history, literature, science, and so forth, all under the veneer of appearing to present logical support.

> . . . Phil Spector is the bona-fide Genius of Teen. Every baroque period has a flowering genius who rises up as the most glorious expression of its style of life--in later-day Rome, the Emperor Commodus; in Renaissance Italy, Benvenuto Callini; in late Augustan England, the Earl of Chesterfield; in the sal volatile Victorian age, Dante Gabriel Rossetti; in late-fancy neo-Greek Federal America, Thomas Jefferson; and in Teen America, Phil Spector is the bona-fide Genius of Teen.[18]

Part of the rhetorical effect of this analogy is to embellish Wolfe's credibility by portraying him as someone more than just familiar with history. From this intimation of intellectual competence, the reader's confidence in Wolfe begins to emerge.

Beyond heightening the architect's credibility, however, analogy can increase the prestige of one or more of the objects of the comparison. Wolfe's portrait of Marshall McLuhan provides a good case in point.[19] Halfway through the article Wolfe compares McLuhan to Freud, and for the remainder of the essay Wolfe amplifies the analogy. To be sure, Wolfe shows similarities shared between the two men, but he does more. That Wolfe even would think to compare McLuhan to Freud increases the former's credibility, the very act of placing the men side by side allowing for ideational transference.[20]

Freud's credibility interacts with McLuhan's, reforming the audience's views of each. The image of Freud admittedly may tarnish when placed in league with McLuhan, but the lesser known McLuhan enjoys an ascendance in stature because of the comparison--and it is McLuhan's ethos, not Freud's, with which Wolfe as polemicist for McLuhan is most concerned. The mutual interaction and transference of credibility also may be at work when Wolfe confidently draws an analogy between his subject and a seemingly unlikely counterpart. The rhetorical effect, for example, of Wolfe's casually dropped, matter-of-fact comparison of gangster Bugsy Siegel'a aesthetic, psychological, and cultural insights to those of Cezanne, Freud, and Weber probably stems less from the analogy's validity than from the credibility of Cezanne, Freud, and Weber--let alone from the fact that Wolfe's audience is implanted with the idea that there is some basis for comparison by virtue of the attempt itself.[21]

Whereas analogy involves a literal or figurative comparison of objects, metaphor takes only the form of the latter. Usually well attended because of its novelty, metaphor draws its sustenance from the arousal of tension. The incongruity presented, Richards believes, confuses and strains the mind; hence, "the mind will always try to find connections. . . ."[22] This search for resolution becomes the gripping power of creative metaphor.

The mystique of metaphor, however, is sacrificed somewhat in public address where the inherent nature of the rhetorical event constrains the quality of metaphor production. Because the goal is persuasion, not private reflection, it is a simple metaphor that the rhetorical experience demands. The transitory nature of speech denies the auditor the luxury of "leisurely interpretation," so, hence, the rhetor hopes for an immediate response, using "metaphoric stimuli [which] seek to provoke a ready, almost automatic response."[23]

Perhaps because Wolfe writes the way people commonly speak and think, his metaphors possess many of the qualities found in those of public address. Casual, colloquial, and readily comprehensible, there is an oral tone to Wolfe's figures. Although they appear in a medium allowing for leisurely interpretation, they nevertheless are processed swiftly because their "auditors" respond similar to a listening audience.

Neither poetic nor elegant, the phoros of Wolfe's metaphor speaks to a plebeian mentality. Hence, while many of Wolfe's analogies appeal more to the learned, his "condensed analogies"[24]--his metaphors and similes--address a decidedly more common populace: "She had an incredible drunk smile that spread out soft and gooey like a can of Sherwin-Williams paint covering the world."[25] Such metaphors are consistent with Wolfe's campaign against worn-out figures and his goal to freshen and enliven popular literature. As Wolfe says, he is always "on the lookout for the metaphors of the future."[26]

Wolfe's exotic creations notwithstanding, his most effective metaphors possess qualities besides novelty. Often Wolfe repeats a particular metaphor to emphasize a point. Throughout Electric Kool-Aid, for instance, there occurs the statement, "You're either on the bus or off the bus." The word "bus" has both literal and figurative meaning. Because Kesey and the Merry Pranksters are traveling by their own bus across country, there is a literal dimension to Kesey's statement. But the bus, as the reader soon realizes, symbolizes the entire trip, i.e., the quest for personal growth and self-discovery. To say you are either on the bus or off the bus is to say that you are either committed to a search for identity or you are not. There is no middle ground, no partial enthusiasm--either you are completely dedicated or you are off the "bus."[27]

In sum, Wolfe's use of analogy and metaphor provide his work with "a structure and '. . . conceptual setting"[28] which promotes belief in a simple, facile world, while simultaneously enhancing Wolfe's ethos.

Single Causality. Most of Wolfe's analysis is offered without qualification. It is not "I think . . . ," "It would appear . . .," "One might conclude. . . ." Wolfe's is a confident criticism; "sometimes," "usually," and "perhaps" seldom preface his statements. While the style does imply a certain positiveness, it also denies the wisdom of multiple causation since it dictates that single answers and explanations be given.

Wolfe, for example, presents nostalgie de la boue as the motive for for those attending Leonard Bernstein's fund-raising gathering for Black Panthers. That is a respectable analysis. But might not some of the Bernsteins' guests have been totally sincere? And how many others were motivated by both sincerity and nostalgie de la boue? And could there even be those who attended out of curiosity and nothing more? Wolfe does not say that nostalgie de la boue was probably a motive of many, for it would weaken the simplicity and strength of his thesis. Although the notion of single causality pales when contrasted to the more sophisticated concept of process, many writers still would rather propose all-inclusive, all-explaining theories. Then, whether blinded by the theory or desiring to have everything perfectly conform, the writer oversimplifies, overgeneralizes, and sometimes overedits his material. Consider the problem of overediting.

In "Radical Chic" celebrities and socialites gather supposedly in an attempt to help raise bail and legal costs for recently imprisoned members of the Black Panther Party. The occasion, according to Wolfe, is really an

exercise in social slumming by white liberals wishing desperately to be fashionable. But Wolfe's evidence is sculptured, beginning with the editing of the party list.

> There seem to be a thousand stars above and a thousand stars below, a room full of stars, a penthouse duplex full of stars, a Manhattan tower full of stars, with marvelous people drifting through the heavens, Jason Robards, John and D. D. Ryan, Gian-Carlo Menotti, Schuyler Chapin, Goddard Lieberson, Mike Nichols, Lillian Hellman, Larry Rivers, Aaron Copeland, Richard Avedon, Milton and Amy Greene, Lukas Foss, Jennie Tourel, Samuel Barber, Jerome Robbins, Steve Sondheim, Adolf and Phyllis Green, Betty Comden, and the Patrick O'Neals.
> . . . . . .
> There's Otto Preminger in the library and Jean vanden Heuvel in the hall, and Peter and Cheray Duckin in the living room, and Frank and Donna Stanton, Gail Lumet, Sheldon Harnick, Cynthia Phipps, Burton Lane, Mrs. August Heckscher, Roger Wilkins, Barbara Walters, Bob Silvers, Mrs. Richard Avedon, Mrs. Arthur Penn, Julie Belafonte, Harold Taylor, and scores more. . . .[29]

There are, as Wolfe says, "others" in attendance. But why are some singled out for mention over "others"? One critic claims, "Personal friends of his [Wolfe] who were at the Bernsteins (like Gloria Steinem) go largely unscored, while old enemies are dragged in incongrously from the wings to be nostalgie de la boue-ed."[30]

In part Wolfe's omission of Gloria Steinem from the proceedings may be seen as the protection of a friend. After all, the Bernsteins' guests, whether when individually inspected or when viewed collectively as an ideology, do not fare well under Wolfe's dissection. Then, too, Gloria Steinem does not quite fit the mold, the basic mood that Wolfe is trying to create: shallow, guilt-ridden, masochistic, but always chic men and women, willingly being intimidated and abused by knowing Blacks.

Wolfe's selection of a cast and setting consistent with his theme is also apparent in the depiction of the guests of honor. For their white

audience, Wolfe believes, the Black Panthers are romantic heroes: oppressed, alienated, militant, violent, they are glamorously notorious. What with "shoot-outs, revolutions, pictures in Life magazine of policemen grabbing Black Panthers like they were Vietcong--somehow it all runs together in the head with the whole thing of how beautiful they are."[31] And so it becomes radically chic--the ultimate status achievement--to know a Black Panther or two. They are so poised, so stylish, so black.

> These are no civil-rights Negroes wearing gray suits three sizes too big--
> --no more interminable Urban League banquets in hotel ballrooms where they try to alternate the blacks and whites around the tables as if they were stringing Arapaho beads--
> --these are real men![32]

The impression rendered is that the Panthers are the only Blacks in the room and the only kind of Blacks acceptable to the audience gathered. Maybe true, but why are Roy Wilkins, Preston Wilcox, Floyd McKissick, and Ray Innis at the gathering?[33] And why does Wolfe neglect to record their presence? And what about the minor discripancies? "What if Barbara Walters doesn't set the right tone in her ski parka? Retailor it, by God, to 'a checked pants suit with a great fluffy collar.'"[34]

Despite Wolfe's somewhat self-serving disclosure of information in "Radical Chic," most of his data does appear accurate, confirmed in the main by attending eyewitnesses.[35] Yet such "third-party" verification is not available in many of Wolfe's other articles. Frequently Wolfe is the only audience to what is said and done. Unlike, say, the motion picture critic's work, the accuracy and soundness of Wolfe's analysis cannot be compared to counterpart thought. Owing to the nature of his interests, Wolfe roams about a rarely travelled homestead, exercising his craft without direct peer competition.

Unfortunately, in most cases, the reader's own background and experience are unlikely to aid appreciably in assessing Wolfe's message. His audience simply may never have been exposed to, much less knowledgeable about, the people and places profiled. Even when a well-known personality warrants Wolfe's attention, the reader is still receptive to discarding old images and accepting new gospel; in fact, a celebrity's mystique probably is enhanced if biographical accounts <u>are</u> somewhat conflicting.

Neither critic nor reader is in a position much of the time to discredit Wolfe's work. It is Wolfe's word against his subject's. But here again, disclaimer is unlikely. The little people because of their status, says Dwight Macdonald, have no real power to object "if they think they have been misrepresented," while celebrities welcome any publicity, accurate or not.[36] The result: Wolfe can write with the brash confidence of knowing that he occupies the position of a virtually unchallengable source. What emerges is a rhetoric of trust. Because the means to judge Wolfe's message are limited, belief rests ultimately upon the source's credibility.

Journalistic tampering with evidence obviously raises questions about reportorial obligation and moral stance. In particular, is it ethical to retouch one's literary portraits? Occasional and minor screening of facts could be sanctioned on the condition that the essence of the message is not altered seriously; the author's thesis simply is fleshed out and heightened. But when Wolfe edits the Bernsteins' party list, is it of background importance or an attempt to set that all-important mood central to Wolfe's thesis?

At the heart of the matter there emerges broader, philosophical query: When the writer intentionally alters facts--whether they be minor details or major instances--does he not encroach upon the realm of creativity reserved

for writers of fiction, not journalism? The argument is not to indict the activity per se but only to question what it ought to be called. When is "journalism" no longer "journalism"? Where does the journalist's license end and the novelist's begin? Critics of Wolfe and his brand of journalism believe that the journalist must indicate clearly when literary license is used. The novelist has no similar labeling obligation as it is understood that imagination is the nucleus of his work. Dwight Macdonald, consequently, chides Wolfe less for employing literary license than for blending it with reality, all unbeknownst to the reader. Wolfe "shift[s] gears between fact and fantasy, spoof and reportage, until nobody knows which end is, at the moment, up."[37] Fact and fiction become one, inseparable because each shares a similar stylistic encasing.

The reader, thus, is restricted from a complete machinery for thought, denied equal access to inspect the same materials available to the writer. Because much of this evidence leading to the writer's viewpoint is concealed, the validity of the "message" presented cannot be evaluated critically.[38] Granted, full disclosure of all the facts in any story hardly can be expected. Given the demand characteristics of journalism, editing must occur. But the journalist should not deviously conceal important evidence. When possible, the materials from which the reporter reasons should be open to inspection. Allowed such intellectual forum, the reader is whole again, to judge for himself and to arrive at his own sympathies.

Hyperbolic 'Put-On'. In 1965, New Yorker magazine celebrated its fortieth birthday, an anniversary Wolfe believed should be duly "commemorated." Wishing to show how the New Yorker had become not only dull and predictable but second-rate in its literary offerings, Wolfe first considered parody.

But he realized,

> there was one grave problem in using the parody style to deal with a magazine like The New Yorker in 1965. If a magazine happens to be dull, then a good parody of it will be dull also. Even that can be funny for 1,500 words or so--but carried to the length that a profile of William Shawn [New Yorker's editor] would require, the piece would smother itself with sheer tedium. It was obvious it couldn't be pushed any further without losing the reader. Besides, The New Yorker had already been parodied many times. I was sure they loved every one of them. My theory was that in every parody, no matter how "telling" you try to make it, there is an implicit tribute. At the very least the parody says: You people have established a style that the whole world recognizes.[39]

Hence, the appropriate style for describing the New Yorker was "anti-parody."

> Instead of trying to do a number on that neat faded-Aubusson front-parlor needlepoint prose of The New Yorker, I would strike precisely the opposite tone . . . [Wolfe's ellipses] something more on the order of the Police Gazette in its red-flock days. . . . Rather than mimicking The New Yorker I was going to give them a voice they couldn't stand. In the anti-parody, as I thought of it, the wilder and crazier the hyperbole, the better. It was a challenge--to use the most lurid colors imaginable to paint a room full of very proper people who had gone to sleep standing up, talking to themselves.[40]

Wolfe maintained that the resulting two-part article--"Tiny Mummies! The True Story of the Ruler of 43d Street's Land of the Walking Dead!"[41] and "Lost in the Whichy Thicket"[42]--was a piece written "as a lark, as a break in what to me were the serious articles I was doing. . . ."[43] Nevertheless, the essay is an edifying document as it illustrates how Wolfe's use of hyperbole distracts the reader while also portraying Wolfe as a man so confident in his analysis that he is not above cock-sure exaggeration.

Ironically viewed as exemplifying Wolfe's style of journalism,[44] Wolfe's anti-parody stirred considerable fury from New Yorker loyalists who besides attacking what was perceived as an ad hominem style, challenged the accuracy of Wolfe's reporting. The best (and lengthiest) refutations came

from Dwight Macdonald[45] and Renata Adler and Gerald Jonas[46] who outlined numerous factual errors committed by Wolfe. In replying to their criticisms some years later, Wolfe claimed that most of his mistakes were intentional, all part of his anti-parody. Deliberate exaggerations aside, Wolfe believed he had still targeted his prey. "Hyperbole, as I say . . . [Wolfe's ellipses] exaggeration . . . [Wolfe's ellipses] but as in any good caricature, the basic structure and contours would be accurate (and, indeed, they were)."[47]

The basic structure and contours may have been accurate. But Wolfe's essay is so incredibly riddled with theme-distorting inaccuracies that the reader of the Macdonald and/or Adler-Jonas essays must view Wolfe's piece with skepticism. Wolfe admits "that in some cases I made mistakes that looked bad because they fell outside the limits of anti-parody . . . ," but contends that most of his errors were microscopic.[48] What difference does it make, Wolfe asks, whether James Thurber used a thin pencil (Macdonald's version) or a crayon (Wolfe's version) to draw pictures on the walls of his New Yorker office if Wolfe's only point was that the scribblings were saved by the New Yorker as a way to immortalize Thurber.[49] Obviously, Thurber's exact writing utensil is not crucial to Wolfe's point. However, because Wolfe is suggesting that the New Yorker, specifically its editor, William Shawn, forever is attempting to preserve the past, it is not a trivial correction to note that Thurber's drawings were saved at the request of the editor who acceded to Thurber's office[50]--and not from Shawn's directive as stated by Wolfe. While Wolfe is justified in questioning the significance of some errors for which he was faulted, clearly not all of his miscues were minor.[51]

Irrespective of anti-parody, the sheer quantity of Wolfe's discrepancies was repugnant to many. Whether seen as fictionalized writing or just

slovenly reporting, Wolfe's anti-parody was unacceptable to a host of literary critics who seized it as a flagship from which to assail Wolfe.

For others who read Wolfe's essay without referring to supplementary interpretation, the impact might have been quite different. To understand the rhetorical nature of anti-parody, one needs first recognize that it stems from a broader category of argument which Jacob Brackman calls the 'put-on'. Says Brackman: "What was once an occasional surprise tactic--called 'joshing' around the turn of the century and 'kidding' since the twenties--has been refined into the very basis of a new mode of communication. In all its permutations, this phenomenon is known as the 'put-on.' It occupies a fuzzy territory between simple leg-pulling and elaborate practical joke, between pointed lampoon and free-floating spoof."[52] The put-on differs from jesting as "it is rarely climaxed by having the 'truth' set straight--when a truth, indeed, exists."[53] This ambiguity of not knowing whether one is being serious or facetious is the essence of the put-on.

In his essay on the New Yorker, Wolfe relies on hyperbolic put-on, a device not uncommon to other Wolfe articles. Brackman, in fact, observes that Wolfe is a master of hyperbolic put-on, a form of put-on that

> typically clothes itself in magical or fantastic garb. Thus, among cleansing products potency is represented . . . by armored knights charging on horseback, their whitening lances aimed at small children; by full-scale tornadoes; by meddlesome birds who fly in kitchen windows; by anti-dirt bombs dropped from fighter planes to score direct, highly explosive hits on soiled linen; by transparent shields that jet visitors at six-inch altitudes across scuffproof floors. . . . Toward the conclusion of each dramatization, the housewife praises the detergent godsend in a paroxysm of commingled surprise and delight that would seem disproportionate had she just been informed of her husband's election to high office.
>
> Had a sample of such frenzied hyperbole been offered fifteen years ago, in the time of earnest hard sell, viewers would have found themselves bewildered at an

> apparent insane joke. Hyperbole in humor has traditionally served as a device for satire or irony. Advertising, however, uses humorous hyperbole in a new and confusing way--deliberately trafficking in ambiquity to obscure the crucial questions for the consumer: What does the product accomplish, and why is it better than the competition?[54]

In literature, hyperbole can be so jutting and arresting that it distracts and detours the reader's critical sensibilities. In Wolfe's put-on hyperbole (anti-parody), the reader becomes engrossed with many of the minor details hyperbolically portrayed. So salient is the exaggeration that attentions are consumed by material often inconsequential to Wolfe's thesis. The reader is preoccupied in pondering whether editor William Shawn <u>really</u> does whisper all the time, whether he <u>really</u> wears layers upon layers of clothes, whether he <u>really</u> is as shy as Wolfe says. But what about Wolfe's contention that the <u>New Yorker</u> is dull, predictable, second-rate literature? This, the actual issue, is overshadowed by its hyperbolic dress--so dazzlingly entertaining that Wolfe's thesis is obscured, allowed to escape careful inspection; it remains aloft, its merit never brought to critical test.[55]

The put-on draws additional Machiavellian potency from its artful blending of fact (non-exaggeration) and fiction (exaggeration). Because neither is distinguished from the other, potential exists for both to be accepted without question, especially by the uninitiated reader who views all "serious sounding" statements as true. This identical packaging of fact and fiction elevates the credibility of the latter, enabling an audience to be swayed as much by literary license as by factual material. As such, the inventiveness and creativity of the put-on artist represent not mere embroidery, but highly persuasive ingredients central to story construction.

Conclusions

Wolfe's portraits of American culture chronicle a rich compendium of modern morals and manners. Perhaps more than any other popular writer of his day, Wolfe has detailed the workings of maybe the most radically changing of times. To be sure, his essays seem certain to be resummoned and restudied.

Such readers will find a rhetoric that continually implies that the world is neither as complex nor as confusing as it might first appear. Only simple questions and simple answers are housed in the reality that Wolfe constructs by the effective wielding of his metaphoric, causative, hyperbolic argument. The rhetorical vision is further rendered real by the facile, confident tone of Wolfe's analysis. Assured and poised, Wolfe's persona itself becomes a subtle but powerful reason to believe as Wolfe does . . . to accept his vision.

To what extent Wolfe's audience accepts the vision, of course, is debatable. Yet whatever Wolfe's influence, his achievements as a journalist are noteworthy. His work has produced rich insights, raised intriguing questions, and suggested scientifically testable hypotheses about rhetorical process. For these accomplishments alone, Tom Wolfe must be recognized as a significant figure in American Journalism.

NOTES

[1]For broad discussions of New Journalism, see, for example, Everette E. Dennis and William L. Rivers, Other Voices: The New Journalism in America (San Francisco: Canfield, 1974), chs. 1-2; Richard A. Kallan, "Entrance," to New Journalism, ed. Marshall Fishwick (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1975), pp. 8-15; Nicolaus Mills, "Introduction," to The New Journalism: A Historical Anthology, ed. Nicolaus Mills (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), pp. xi-xx; Ronald Weber, "Some Sort of Artistic Excitement," in The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy, ed. Ronald Weber (New York: Hastings House, 1974), pp. 13-26; and Tom Wolfe, New Journalism, chs. 1-3.

[2]"The Personal Voice and the Impersonal Eye," Atlantic, June 1966, p. 87.

[3]Michael Arlen, "Notes on the New Journalism," Atlantic, May 1972, p. 45.

[4]"The New Journalism and the Old--Thoughts After Watergate," Public Interest, No. 35 (Spr. 1974), p. 77.

[5]Electric Kool-Aid (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1968).

[6]Radical Chic (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970).

[7]New Journalism, with an anthology, ed. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

[8]Painted Word (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1975).

[9]Kandy-Kolored (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1965).

[10]Pump House (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1968).

[11]Mauve Gloves (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976).

[12]For one of the better but more cynical analyses of Wolfe's style, see Richard Hoggart, "The Dance of the Long-Legged Fly: On Tom Wolfe's Poise," Encounter, Aug. 1966, pp. 63-71. For a good parody of Wolfe's style, see Linda Kuehl, "Dazzle-Dust: A Wolfe in Chic Clothing," Commonweal, 7 May 1971, pp. 212-216.

[13]Permanence and Change, 2nd ed., rev. (Los Altos, Calif.: Hermes, 1954), p. 90.

[14]Models and Metaphors (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1962), p. 41.

[15]"Radical Chic," in Radical Chic, pp. 32-33.

[16]"King of the Status Dropouts," in Pump House, p. 77.

[17]"The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby," in Kandy-Kolored, pp. 94-95.

[18]"The First Tycoon of Teen," in Kandy-Kolored, p. 66.

[19]See "What if He Is Right?" in Pump House, pp. 133-170.

[20]I. A. Richards (The Philosophy of Rhetoric [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1936]) early on recognized that metaphor was more than linguistic ornamentation or the clever displacement of the literal with the figurative. "In the simplest formulation, when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts

of different things active together and supported by a single interaction" (p. 93). Metaphor is not merely a substitution of words, maintained Richards, but rather "a borrowing between and intercourse of thoughts, a transaction between contexts" (p. 94). Agreeing, Chaim Perelman, and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver [1958; rpt. Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1969]) argue that in any analogy there is an interaction of terms, resulting in "transfers of value from phoros ["the terms that serve to buttress the argument," p. 373] to theme ["the terms to which the conclusion relates," p. 373] and vice versa . . . ," p. 381. In any analogy or metaphor, then, phoros and theme interact, and the resulting mutual transference of meaning produces two mutated, but similarly perceived terms; phoros and theme become one.

[21]See "Las Vegas (What?) Las Vegas (Can't Hear You! Too Noisy) Las Vegas!!!!" in Kandy-Kolored, p. 11.

[22]Richards, p. 126.

[23]Michael Osborn and Douglas Ehninger, "The Metaphor in Public Address," Speech Monographs, 29 (1962), 233.

[24]According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, the metaphor represents a contracted proof--"a condensed analogy," the essence of which is realized by a word or phrase, as opposed to the analogy's fuller line of argument, p. 399.

[25]"The Marvelous Mouth," in Kandy-Kolored, p. 119.

[26]"How You Can Be as Well-Informed as Tom Wolfe," Esquire, Nov. 1967, p. 212.

[27]Michael Osborn raises an interesting question concerning the logical function of metaphor: "Does an image embody some tacit enthymematic structure and function as demonstration within itself, or does it serve more to dramatize, illustrate, and reinforce a logical structure made explicit elsewhere in the speech?" "Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family," Quart. Jour. of Speech, 53 (1967), 125. Perhaps the answer varies given the particular metaphor and its particular context. In the case of Wolfe's bus metaphor, the figure serves to reemphasize and rekindle an argument Wolfe has repeated throughout his essay.

[28]Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 385.

[29]"Radical Chic," pp. 6-7.

[30]"Tom Wolfe: Reactionary Chic," Ramparts, Jan. 1972, p. 61.

[31]"Radical Chic," p. 8.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Kuehl, p. 214.

[34]Ibid.

[35]The "Radical Chic" story "is generally so accurate that even some of the irate guests at the Bernsteins later wondered how Wolfe--who in fact used shorthand--managed to smuggle a tape recorder onto the premises." Timothy Foote, "Fish in the Brandy Snifter," Time, 21 Dec. 1970, p. 74.

[36]"Parajournalism, or Tom Wolfe and His Magic Writing Machine," N.Y. Rev. of Books, 26 Aug. 1965, p. 5.

[37]"Parajournalism II: Wolfe and the New Yorker," N.Y. Rev. of Books, 3 Feb. 1966, p. 18.

[38]Moreover, to withhold or doctor a story because it is supposedly unrepresentative and atypical of a broader "truth" is to prevent journalism from fulfulling one of its prime functions. "Paradoxically, the limited generalizations characteristic of most journalism," Gerald Grant states, "is often a great strength. It doesn't care what the general theory is, but what is true in this particular instance. Ignorance of what is supposed to be true may have the productive result of puncturing myth or forcing scholars to re-evaluate old evidence." "The 'New Journalism' We Need," Columbia Journalism Rev., 9 (1970), 15.

[39]"The New Journalism: A la Recherche des Whicky Thickets," New York, 21 Feb. 1972, p. 41.

[40]Ibid.

[41]New York, 11 April 1965, pp. 7-9, 24-27.

[42]Ibid., 18 April 1965, pp. 16-24, 44.

[43]"The New Journalism: A la Recherche," p. 39.

[44]On this point, Wolfe contends that skeptics "wanted to create a situation in which this entire new trend in journalism--involving many writers by that time--would be judged on the basis of one piece of writing. As far as I was concerned, it was a silly position to be drawn into under any circumstances. But especially in this case. The fact was that my two pieces on The New Yorker were not even an example of The New Journalism.

. . . . . .

In short, both The Columbia Journalism Review and the New York Review of Books waited for a couple of light pieces that had as little as possible to do with the New Journalism--and then very solemnly reached the Aha! conclusion which goes: 'Aha! So that's what it's all about!'" "The New Journalism: A la Recherche," p. 46.

[45]See "Parajournalism II: Wolfe and the New Yorker," N.Y. Rev. of Books, 3 Feb. 1966, pp. 18-24.

[46]See "The Letter," in Leonard Lewin, "Is Fact Necessary?" Columbia Journalism Rev., 4 (1966), 32-34.

[47]"The New Journalism: A la Recherche," p. 41.

[48]Ibid., p. 45, f.n. 4.

[49]Ibid.

[50]"Parajournalism II," p. 20.

[51]Macdonald admits that many of Wolfe's inaccuracies were of minor detail, but he argues that all together they form "a rhetoric that builds up," leading to a whole much greater than the sum of its parts. Ibid., p. 19.

[52]The Put-On: Modern Fooling and Modern Mistrust (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1971), pp. 17-18.

[53]Ibid., p. 19.

[54]Ibid., pp. 112-113.

[55]Indeed, it is most ironic that fantasy, spoof, and put-on ever would be used by Wolfe--if even only occasionally--when their purpose clearly contradicts that of New Journalism. This is especially true for the put-on. Whereas the exploration of truth is New Journalism's raison d'etre, the put-on is a strategy for concealing what one truly thinks and feels. Unlike parody and satire, the put-on's distortion is not to create perspective, but rather to cloud reality. As such, the put-on rarely leads to higher understanding of anything. Moreover, if New Journalism seeks reportorial involvement and commitment, why the put-on? The product of people that shun artistic commitment and risk because they are afraid of failure, says Jacob Brackman, the put-on "arise[s] out of a partial consciousness of one's own ridiculousness, in the absence of sufficient courage or intellectual perseverance to see that ridiculousness through to its roots and to alter it," p. 107. The put-on safely allows the artist to avoid bringing his talent to the test of serious judgment for there is always present the opportunity to escape negative criticism by replying, "But it was just a put-on. . . ." Correspondingly, the critic, unsure of a work's purpose, steers away from offering serious criticism, fearful of being snickered at for for foolishly viewing somberly what was done "obviously" in jest. Artists and critics of put-ons ultimately have little to offer their audiences.